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RECLAIMING KHADIJA'S AND MUHAMMAD'S MARRIAGE AS AN ISLAMIC PARADIGM

Toward a New History of the Muslim Present

Shadaab Rahemtulla and Sara Ababneh

Using masculinities studies and a history of the present framework, Shadaab Rahemtulla and Sara Ababneh examine the marriage of Prophet Muhammad and Khadija (d. ca. 620) to question hegemonic narratives on "ideal" Muslim marriages. Muhammad's marriages—and, by extension, his masculinity—are often portrayed as expressions of power disparity, with Muhammad marrying multiple wives who were significantly younger in age. Due to the normative place of "prophetic practice" (sunna), these historical narratives have exerted a lasting impact on marital ethics and law. Yet the example of Khadija paints an alternative prophetic practice/masculinity: she was a powerful businesswoman fifteen years Muhammad's senior, and their monogamous marriage lasted twenty-five years. In this article, the authors ask, what can we, as Muslim feminists committed to gender egalitarian partnerships in our own contexts, learn from this premodern marriage, and how can we reclaim it as a model for contemporary Muslim masculinities?

Keywords: egalitarianism, Islam, marriage, masculinity, Muhammad

In this article, we examine the marriage of Prophet Muhammad and Khadija bint Khuwaylid (d. ca. 620) to question hegemonic narratives about "ideal" Muslim marriages. These narratives portray Muhammad's marital life as relationships of power disparity (however compassionate and loving) with the Prophet marrying not only multiple wives but also spouses who were significantly younger than him.

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Such portrayals have not been plucked out of the air; there is much truth to them. Over the course of his life, Muhammad had a total of thirteen wives and concubines, all of whom, with the exception of Khadija, were his junior.[1] Perhaps the most (in)famous example is Ayesha bint Abu Bakr who, in one hadith report, stated that she was six years old when she was married to the Prophet, nine when the marriage was consummated.[2] To be sure, these marriages were not merely expressions of desire but also about strengthening sociopolitical ties within the emergent Muslim polity. Ayesha, after all, was the daughter of the companion Abu Bakr, Hafsa the daughter of the companion ʻUmar ibn al-Khattab, and Umm Habiba the daughter of Abu Sufyan, an enemy-turned-ally following the conquest of Mecca (629–630).[3] Given the centrality of the sunna (prophetic precedence) in Islamic normative practice, the Prophet's marriages have indelibly shaped Muslim understandings of what constitutes an ideal marriage. Yet Muhammad also had a monogamous, twenty-five-year-long relationship with Khadija, whose example paints a very different picture of Muhammadi marriage.

Here, we ask, what would a sunna based on this type of marriage look like? Early biographical sources show that Khadija was a powerful, respected businesswoman who had been married twice previously; that she was fifteen years senior to the Prophet (at the time of their marriage, she was forty and Muhammad twenty-five); and that she was Muhammad's employer, dispatching him to lead her trade caravan to Syria. The harmonious nature of their marriage is supported by the fact that, long after her death, we have hadith reports of Muhammad praising Khadija's character, her conviction in his prophetic mission, and her unwavering support for the Muslim community. We even have a cluster of hadith reports in which Ayesha, often celebrated by (Sunni) Muslims as Muhammad's favorite wife, expresses her deep-seated jealousy of Khadija. To quote Ayesha: "Never did I feel jealous of any woman as I was jealous of Khadija."[4]

But this article is not just about Khadija; we focus equally on Prophet Muhammad. Because gender is a *relational* category, Khadija and Muhammad, as marital partners, necessarily function as foils to each other; to write about Khadija is, simultaneously, to make statements about Muhammad, and vice versa. By unearthing Khadija's articulate personality and intelligence, we try, at the same time, to offer wider observations about Muhammad's *masculinity*; namely, that he was comfortable and secure within this (at least in terms of our current twenty-first-century sensibilities) nonhegemonic marital arrangement. At no point in

[1] Barbara F. Stowasser, "Wives of the Prophet," in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an*, 6 vols., ed. Jane D. McAuliffe (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 5:506–8.

[2] Muhammad Ibn Saʻd, cited in Denise A. Spellberg, *Politics, Gender, and the Islamic Past: The Legacy of A'isha bint Abi Bakr* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 39.

[3] Barbara F. Stowasser, *Women in the Qur'an, Traditions, and Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 123.

[4] Sahih Muslim, vol. 4, ed. Muhammad Ashraf and trans. Abdul Hamid Siddiqui (Lahore: Hafeez, 1976), hadith no. 5971. See also hadith nos. 5972, 5973, 5974, and 5976.

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their twenty-five-year relationship did he seem to feel threatened as a man. The nonhegemonic character of this Muhammadi masculinity is the underlying theme that runs throughout this article, and a theme, we argue, that needs to be accented in liberationist engagements with the sunna in order to reconceptualize Islamic marriage, in our own times, as an egalitarian partnership of equals. We first set the stage for discussion by clarifying our methodology (history of the present) and unpacking our underlying conceptual framework (masculinities analysis). We then unpack two "snapshots" of Khadija's life: first, her marriage to the Prophet, and second, her presence during the first qur'anic revelations. To do this, we draw on a number of *sira* (biographical) sources, including Muhammad ibn Ishaq's (d. 767) biography of Muhammad, considered the first authoritative work on the Prophet's life; Muhammad ibn Sa'd's (d. 845) biographical dictionary of early Muslim women; Abu Ja'far al-Tabari's (d. 923) historical compendium; and Isma'il ibn Kathir's (d. 1373) biography of Muhammad.[5] We conclude by clarifying the broader contribution of the paper.

A History of the Present

Drawing on French poststructuralist philosopher Michel Foucault (1926–84), we are trying here to write a (new) history of the present. Essentially, this method entails "using history as a means of critical engagement with the present."[6] A history of the present is based on a key premise: that history is an act of the present. Historical narratives often tell us more about *current* power relations than about those of the past, functioning to justify a certain contemporary way of life and to legitimate certain practices. In doing so, post-Enlightenment histories present linear trajectories between current states, practices, or social structures and those in the past. The most infamous examples are (Western) world history narratives that look back to the Greeks and Romans. In terms of gender relations, choosing the Greeks and Romans as starting points for modern social structures paints a picture of patriarchy as being the normal, indeed natural, state of affairs. Similarly, realist international relations theories draw on the Peloponnesian war (431–404 BCE) in order to justify a world order in which only the strongest survives.[7] A critical part of history writing is that certain historical moments/narratives are silenced and rendered invisible. The histories of matriarchal societies are left out of patriarchal

[5] Muhammad Ibn Ishaq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans. A. Guillaume (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967); Muhammad Ibn Sa'd, *The Women of Medina*, trans. Aisha Bewley (London: Ta-Ha, 1995); Abu Ja'far al-Tabari, *The History of Al-Tabari*, vol. 6, trans. and annot. W. Montgomery Watt and M. V. McDonald (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988); and Isma'il ibn Kathir, *The Life of the Prophet Muhammad*, 2 vols., trans. Trevor Le Gassick (Reading, UK: Garnet, 1998).

[6] David Garland, "What Is a 'History of the Present'?: On Foucault's Genealogies and Their Critical Preconditions," *Punishment and Society* 16, no. 4 (2014): 365–84, quotation on 367.

[7] Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, intro. and notes M. I. Finley, trans. Rex Warner (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1972).

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world history narratives. Likewise, global orders in which nations and city-states lived peacefully together, and without notions of expansion, are omitted in realist theories of the state.

Because our current reality is markedly unequal, shaped by hierarchal social relations and competing forces of power, certain discourses and practices (namely, those of the dominant social group) have become hegemonic, taking on an aura of neutrality. It is precisely this "innocence" that a history of the present seeks to deconstruct. Thus, the present reality is exposed as being neither a natural order nor a divinely ordained one but a social construction. By documenting the (often violent and coercive) historical trajectories of these discourses and practices—an act of archaeological recovery that Foucault calls "genealogy"—a history of the present reveals the "contingency" of these phenomena, and thus the contingency of the present as a whole.[8] To quote Foucault, a history of the present, "disturbs what was previously thought immobile; it fragments what was thought unified; it shows the heterogeneity of what was imagined consistent with itself."[9] This is no mere academic exercise. By deconstructing the present vis-à-vis the past, the larger objective is to engage in "transformative politics," to imagine the possibilities of reconstructing radically new presents that value alterity and difference.[10] History, then, is a contested discursive site; while certain histories legitimatize certain presents, other histories (of the present) question those hegemonic narratives, point to and excavate silences, and in so doing, unsettle the present social orders of inequality.

This raises a question in the Muslim context: What is our present? We argue that, in terms of gender relations, our present is marked by a glaring contradiction. On the one hand, Islamic marital paradigms—which we have inherited through historical narratives of the past—are deeply patriarchal; yet, on the other hand, our lived realities as Muslim couples and/or parents have drastically shifted. Irrespective of what Muslim patriarchs may claim in the public sphere regarding the "proper" role of men as heads of the household, in practice men are no longer "in charge" of their families as breadwinners; today, women are also active in the workforce as co-providers, principal providers, and even sole providers (in the case of single working mothers with no assistance from the father of their children). *This* is our present. To put it another way, a manifest disjuncture exists between entrenched Muslim discourses of (hegemonic) masculinity and the fluid distribution of gender roles that has been unfolding on the ground, ones in which women are increasingly (co)bearing the burden of financial maintenance, among

[8] See Sophie Fuggle, Yari Lanci, and Martina Tazzioli, eds., *Foucault and the History of Our Present* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 3.

[9] Michel Foucault, quoted in Garland, "What Is a 'History of the Present'?," 372. For the original quotation, see Paul Rabinow, ed., *The Foucault Reader: An Introduction to Foucault's Thought* (New York: Penguin, 1984), 82.

[10] Fuggle, Lanci, and Tazzioli, *Foucault*, 3.

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other roles, yet without reaping, as a collective group, the social benefits of doing so.[11] What we need to do now is *recalibrate* our inherited, historical corpus of Islamic knowledge—marital paradigms, in particular—to reflect this new social reality. Silencing certain social realities is directly linked to silences in Islamic historical narratives. Said differently, accenting certain prophetic marital practices makes current practices seem un-Islamic. By unearthing the example of Khadija and her relationship to the Prophet, we want to reexamine a relationship that despite not being silenced, has been strikingly absent when constructing normative narratives/histories of Islamic marriage. This is the history of the Muslim present we seek to write.

A point of clarification is in order. In writing a new history of the Muslim present, we are not interested in apologetics, in superimposing our own modern subjectivities onto a premodern past. A history of the present should not be confused with "presentism"—or in lay terms, bad history writing—which falls into the anachronistic trap of "reading present-day social arrangements or cultural meanings back into history or claiming to discover phenomena in earlier times with the same significance and character they have today."[12] Foucault himself sharply criticized historians who used contemporary terms and concepts to understand earlier societies.[13] In the context of this article, we want to clarify that we are not trying to "discover" egalitarianism—a manifestly modern notion—in the premodern Muslim past and thereby justifying egalitarianism in our own times. As feminists, we do not need to justify equality between women and men; as critical students of history, we are not claiming that Muhammad's and Khadija's relationship was egalitarian. It was not. Khadija was, unequivocally, the more powerful partner in this vertical relationship and Muhammad was dependent on her in many ways. What we have in their example is a nonpatriarchal—indeed, acutely matriarchal—relation of power. And in writing a history of our present, we believe this remarkable (and admittedly unrepresentative) historical moment provides us with a critical prophetic resource, an alternative and yet authoritative archive—this is a marriage, after all, that lasted twenty-five years—with which to begin the project of reconstructing Muslim marriage, in our own times, as an egalitarian partnership of equals. In sum, drawing on the marriage of Khadija and Muhammad, we seek to reconstruct a different history of present Muslim marriages.

[11] See *Women's Stories, Women's Lives: Male Authority in Muslim Contexts* (Kuala Lumpur: Musawah, 2016). This qualitative social research project documents the life stories of fifty-five Muslim women from nine countries between 2011 and 2013, teasing out the striking disparities between lived realities and "Islamic" ideals.

[12] Garland, "What Is a 'History of the Present'?," 367.

[13] Michael Roth, "Foucault's 'History of the Present,'" *History and Theory* 20, no. 1 (February 1981): 32–46, esp. 36.

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Masculinities

Before examining this relationship in detail, let us unpack our conceptual framework: "masculinities analysis." Masculinity can be understood as what it means to be a man at a certain time and place. Like femininity, masculinity is not a biological fact but a social construction. Just as French feminist Simone de Beauvoir (d. 1986) famously stated that "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman," so too, manhood is a becoming, a product of socialization.[14] Underlining the sheer diversity of men's experiences is key to masculinities studies. For "gender does not confer privilege on *all* men," as categories like race and class intersect with masculinity in complex ways to create entrenched hierarchies among men.[15] Indeed, in contexts of war, violence is disproportionately inflicted on men's bodies, in particular the bodies of poor, young men who are sent off to die at the front.[16] This is not to water down the sexist reality of patriarchy, to suggest that men do not collectively benefit, as a social group, at the expense of women. They certainly do. But the point is that there are critical gendered hierarchies *within* male circles; namely, there are "hegemonic" masculinities, which represent a normative ideal of power, strength, and control (despite being a minority, if not exceptional, experience), and "subordinated" masculinities, which fall short of that constructed ideal.[17]

Drawing on the work of Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci (d. 1937), we distinguish between "hegemony" and "direct domination." Whereas direct domination entails violence and force, hegemony represents the successful mainstreaming of the worldview (the ideas, assumptions, and lived experiences) of the ruling class within society as a whole. By buying into this worldview, by erroneously associating the ruling class's interests with their own, the working class gives their consent to the existing status quo.[18] Connecting this insight to gender, hegemonic masculinity is the ideal type of masculinity that society respects and to which most men aspire but only few reach. Those regarded as hegemonic men benefit the most from the system. Furthermore, while hegemonic masculinities can, and often do, consolidate their privileged position by inflicting acts of brute violence onto subordinated masculinities (take, for instance, gang rape in a men's prison), what makes hegemonic masculinities hegemonic—as opposed to an act of direct domination—is that they have attained mass "cultural consent" as the way of being a *real* man, even among men with subordinated masculinities.[19] It is important to clarify here that, when we speak about hegemonic masculinity, we are describing

[14] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (1949; repr., New York: Vintage, 1989), 267.

[15] Nancy E. Dowd, "Asking the Man Question: Masculinities Analysis and Feminist Theory," *Harvard Journal of Law and Gender* 33 (2010): 415–30, quotation on 418, emphasis added.

[16] Dowd, "Asking the Man Question," 421.

[17] R. W. Connell and James W. Messerschmidt, "Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept," *Gender and Society* 19, no. 6 (December 2005): 829–59, esp. 832.

[18] For a useful though admittedly dated survey of Gramsci's theory, see Thomas R. Bates, "Gramsci and the Theory of Hegemony," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 36, no. 2 (1975): 351–66.

[19] Connell and Messerschmidt, "Hegemonic Masculinity," 846.

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the particular hegemonic masculinity of today, of our own times. Hegemonic masculinity also varies across space, but through a globalized empire of media and Hollywood movies we can nonetheless speak of a global hegemonic masculinity. We want to point out here the differences between our own understanding of masculinity and that of the time and space of the Prophet. Masculinity is not a frozen, timeless category, and just as masculinity changes with context so too do constructions of the hegemonic and, by extension, the subordinate.

While most scholarship in the field of masculinities analysis tends to be descriptive, ethnographically documenting the lived experiences of men and teasing out the complexities and contradictions of manhood, (re)construction is also an integral part of the field—that is, conceptualizing and enacting a *feminist* masculinity. The place of masculinity has been contested within feminist circles, with some feminists arguing that masculinity is inherently patriarchal and thus ought to be categorically resisted, and others maintaining that masculinity can, in fact, be reclaimed.[20] For the latter, then, masculinity is not essentially oppressive but a social practice that is shaped and can thus be reshaped. African American feminists have been particularly critical of "woman only" discourses within feminist circles.[21] bell hooks argues that simply dismissing men and masculinity outright reflects the privileged racial and class baggage of white feminists, who have failed to see that, "patriarchy does not negate the existence of class and race privilege or exploitation, that all men do not benefit equally from sexism. They [white feminists] did not want to acknowledge that bourgeois white women, though often victimized by sexism, have more power and privilege, are less likely to be exploited, or oppressed, than poor, uneducated, non-white males."[22]

That said, it is important to clarify that reconstructing a feminist masculinity is not simply about reclaiming a *subordinated* masculinity. The two are not necessarily the same. Going back to the concept of hegemony (as opposed to direct domination), subordinated masculinities can still, and often do, buy into the legitimacy and normative character of hegemonic masculinity, and thus can continue to benefit from patriarchy as a system. This type of subordinated masculinity is what gender scholars R. W. Connell and James Messerschmidt call "complicit masculinity."[23] Instead, a feminist masculinity has a twofold objective: to challenge the existing patriarchal construction of normative (read hegemonic) masculinity, and, in its place, to envision alternative normative constructions committed to feminist values of gender equality and inclusion.[24] Men, therefore, have an important role to play in feminist struggles. Indeed, their active involvement is key to main-

[20] Ben Almassi, "Feminist Reclamations of Normative Masculinity: On Democratic Manhood, Feminist Masculinity, and Allyship Practices," *Feminist Philosophy Quarterly* 1, no. 2 (2015): Article 2, https://ojs.lib.uwo.ca/index.php/fpq/article/view/2999/2264.

[21] bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (London: Routledge, 2014), 68.

[22] hooks, *Feminist Theory*, 69.

[23] Connell and Messerschmidt, "Hegemonic Masculinity," 832.

[24] Almassi, "Feminist Reclamations."

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streaming the struggle. However, men's role must be one of genuine ally-ship. In standing in solidarity with women, feminist men need to remain acutely aware of their own privileged, collective status as men (notwithstanding their own individual commitments to women's liberation), and channel their energies into confronting the sexism of fellow *men* as opposed to speaking for women and their experiences.[25]

Religion (or, rather, a specific interpretation of religion) has been fundamental to propping up patriarchal masculinity. To quote Islamic masculinities scholar Amanullah De Sondy, "'Be a man' might be a powerful general expression for the development of a young boy, but when one adds, 'because this is the way that Allah wants you to be,' it becomes a particular way of creating a center point of gender and sexuality."[26] But religion can also become a powerful tool in its dismantlement, reformulating masculinity into an egalitarian practice. This is the wider objective that drives De Sondy's scholarship.[27] In terms of qur'anic theology, he has argued that God is viewed as an "overarching creating/maintaining force" that reduces all of creation—men and women—to equal submission, and this has lasting implications in terms of how gender roles are construed. To associate any segment of that creation (read: men) with the One God, as having a unique affinity to Him/Her/It, constitutes a form of idolatry.[28] De Sondy is especially interested in constructions of prophetic masculinities. And this is our larger contribution: unearthing the nonhegemonic character of the Prophet's first marriage to Khadija, which lasted twenty-five years. The relationship between Khadija and the Prophet, read against the grain of current understandings of masculinity and what it needs to entail, points us to different forms of *Islamic* masculinities.

[25] hooks, *Feminist Theory*, 83. Islamic scholar Amina Wadud has a similar position on progressive men's role in antipatriarchal struggle. See Shadaab Rahemtulla, *Qur'an of the Oppressed: Liberation Theology and Gender Justice in Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 134–37.

[26] Amanullah De Sondy, "Prophecy and Masculinities: The Case of the Qur'anic Joseph," *Cross Currents* (December 2011): 529–39, quotation on 529. Islamic masculinities, as a subject, remains acutely understudied. As Moroccan scholar Lahoucine Ouzgane—a pioneering figure in the field—points out, scholarly attention on gender in the Middle East and North Africa has focused overwhelmingly on femininity and constructions of womanhood, failing to "render Muslim men visible as gendered subjects." See Lahoucine Ouzgane, ed., *Islamic Masculinities* (London: Zed, 2006); and Lahoucine Ouzgane, "The Rape Continuum: Masculinities in the Works of Nawal El Saadawi and Tahar Ben Jelloun," in *Men in African Film and Fiction*, ed. Lahoucine Ouzgane (Suffolk, UK: Boydell and Brewer, 2011). As Ouzgane notes, the scholarship that does exist on masculinities studies has centered on questions of sexuality, in particular homosexuality in Islamic thought and homoerotic practices in Muslim social history. For the former, see Scott Kugle, *Homosexuality in Islam: Critical Reflection on Gay, Lesbian, and Transgender Muslims* (London: Oneworld, 2010); for the latter, see Khaled El-Rouayheb, *Before Homosexuality in the Arab-Islamic World, 1500–1800* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

[27] See also Amanullah De Sondy, *The Crisis of Islamic Masculinities* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014).

[28] De Sondy, "Prophecy and Masculinities," 530.

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Snapshot 1: Matrimony

In the biographical literature, we receive two basic "snapshots" of Khadija's life: her marriage to Muhammad and her presence during the first qur'anic revelations. Scholars possess very little actual information about Khadija.[29] The early sources are mostly silent. We know she was a successful and respected businesswoman, hiring men to trade her goods outside of Mecca.[30] According to one report found in Ibn Sa'd's biographical dictionary, Khadija's "caravan was equal to the general caravan of the [tribe of] Quraysh."[31] As to how exactly she acquired such wealth, contemporary scholars have suggested that she inherited from her father, Khuwaylid ibn Asad, a business that she then expanded significantly using her own entrepreneurial skills.[32] Furthermore, it seems that Khadija had been in two marriages prior to meeting the Prophet. Her first marriage was to Abu Hala ibn al-Nabbash of the tribe of Tamim; together, they had two sons, Hind and Hala.[33] Her second marriage was to 'Atiq ibn 'Abid of the tribe of Makhzum; with him, she had a daughter, also named Hind.[34] The first marriage likely ended in divorce; in the second marriage, 'Atiq died, leaving Khadija a widow.[35] It is telling that the biographical sources attach no stigma to the fact that Khadija was a (widowed) divorcee with children. Indeed, her *kunya* (title) remained throughout her life, Umm Hind—"mother of Hind"—whom she bore with her first husband.[36] Important to add here is that among the Prophet's wives, Khadija's marital background was by no means exceptional. Ayesha once boasted that she was the only virgin married to the Prophet.[37] This claim suggests that the rest of the Prophet's wives had had sexual relations with prior husbands (and in the case of Umm Salama and Umm Habiba, also had children with them), but this did not seem to have been a problem, a source of stigma, for the Prophet or the early Muslims. On the contrary, this was the norm; Ayesha's virginity was the exception.

Our first snapshot is of Khadija's marriage to the Prophet. The two met through her business ventures. She had heard about Muhammad's honest character and hired him to travel to Syria and trade her goods there. According to Ibn Ishaq, this was a lucrative hiring decision, with Khadija doubling her profits.

[29] Syed A. A. Razwy, *Khadija-tul-Kubra (The Wife of the Prophet Muhammad): A Short Story of Her Life* (Elmhurst, NY: Tahrike Tarsile Qur'an, 1990), 1; and Stowasser, *Women in the Qur'an*, 185n52.

[30] Ibn Ishaq, *Life of Muhammad*, 82.

[31] Ibn Sa'd, *Women of Medina*, 10.

[32] Kecia Ali, "Khadijah," in *The Oxford Encyclopaedia of Women in World History*, ed. Bonnie G. Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); and Razwy, *Khadija-tul-Kubra*, 6–8.

[33] Ibn Sa'd, *Women of Medina*, 9.

[34] Ibn Sa'd, *Women of Medina*, 9.

[35] W. Montgomery Watt, "Khadija," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed. (Leiden: Brill Online, 2012).

[36] Ibn Sa'd, *Women of Medina*, 12.

[37] Spellberg, *Politics*, 39.

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Impressed by Muhammad's personality, Khadija approached him and proposed marriage. In other words, not only was Khadija Muhammad's employer but in the initiation of their marital relationship, Khadija was the active player. She approached Muhammad; Muhammad did not approach her. The biographical sources even offer the wording of her proposal. Ibn Ishaq reported that she said to Muhammad, "O son of my uncle. I like you because of our relationship and your high reputation among your people, your trustworthiness and good character and truthfulness."[38] Al-Tabari added that "all the men of her tribe would have been eager to accept this proposal had it been made to them."[39] Alongside underlining the respect that Khadija commanded within Meccan circles, this statement suggests that for classical scholars like al-Tabari, there was nothing strange about the fact that a woman was proposing. Had it seemed odd, the biographers would certainly have commented on it. To be sure, Khadija's proposal may not have been delivered directly. In Ibn Sa'd's account, Khadija did not approach Muhammad herself but rather dispatched her close female friend—Nafisa—to propose on her behalf.[40] Moreover, following Khadija's initial proposal, the Prophet's uncles approached Khadija's father (or possibly her uncle), seeking her hand in marriage.[41] So while we have much to learn from Khadija's initiation of the marriage, we still need to appreciate the wider patriarchal context in which she lived and in which the formalities of her marriage were orchestrated.

In addition to being the initiator of the marriage, Khadija was (and remained) the economic foundation of their union. For one, they had a *matrilocal* relationship, not a patrilocal one; that is, Muhammad moved into Khadija's house and not vice versa.[42] This stands in sharp contrast to contemporary practices in Muslim societies (or, for that matter, in non-Muslim societies) in which patrilocal marriage has become something of an unquestioned, hegemonic norm. Indeed, living inside the house provided and owned by the husband remains a basic foundation of *ta'a* (a wife's "obedience" to the husband) in the family laws of many Muslim-majority countries. Khadija's wealth aside, it is essential to appreciate the economic difficulties and vulnerabilities that constantly plagued the Prophet's early life. In seventh-century Arabia, one had to be a mature adult to inherit,

[38] Ibn Ishaq, *Life of Muhammad*, 82. *Ibn 'ami* (son of my uncle) is a term that refers to the husband, since the husband's father becomes, in a deferential manner, the uncle of the wife upon marriage.

[39] Al-Tabari, *History*, 48. Al-Tabari also provides the wording of Khadija's proposal, albeit slightly differently from Ibn Ishaq: "Cousin, your kinship to me, your standing among your people, your reliability, your character, and your truthfulness make you a good match" (*History*, 48).

[40] Ibn Sa'd, *Women of Medina*, 10.

[41] Ibn Ishaq, *Life of Muhammad*, 83. Al-Tabari provides two reports: one in which the Prophet's uncles approach Khadija's father Khuwaylid (which lines up with Ibn Ishaq's account) and one in which they approach her uncle 'Amr, the latter report claiming that Khuwaylid had already passed away (*History*, 50).

[42] Lings, *Muhammad*, 37.

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and because Muhammad's father ('Abdullah) and grandfather ('Abdul Muttalib) both died before he attained maturity, Muhammad did not inherit from either of them.[43] As a result, financial hardship was a recurring demon in his life. In light of this reality, qur'anic commentators have suggested that Muhammad's marriage to Khadija, and the significant economic changes that it brought about for him, is alluded to in the Qur'an itself, specifically in Q Duha 93:8.[44] The entire Chapter of the Morning Brightness (*surat al-duha*) reads:

> By the morning brightness, (1) by the night when it is calm! (2) Your Lord has neither forsaken you [O Muhammad] nor is He displeased with you, (3) and the Hereafter shall be better for you than the world. (4) Soon your Lord will give you (that with which) you will be pleased. (5) Did He not find you an orphan, and shelter you? (6) Did He not find you astray, and guide you? (7) *Did He not find you needy, and enrich you?* (8) So, as for the orphan, do not oppress him; (9) and as for the beggar, do not chide him; (10) and as for your Lord's blessing, proclaim it. (11)[45]

This passage gives us greater insight into the nature of their marital relationship. It is not the case that Muhammad simply "moved up" economically as a result of his marriage to Khadija; more profoundly, she gifted him with security and closure after a life of vulnerability. In their union, he was deeply dependent on her, but she was not dependent on him. And there is no evidence in the biographical sources suggesting that Muhammad and the first Muslims were ashamed of that reality or tried to conceal it in any way. On the contrary, premodern sources are frank about his poverty prior to marriage. For example, one legendary report claimed that Muhammad, after receiving Khadija's proposal, realized he did not have enough money to pay the dowry (*mahr*), at which point Gabriel descended from the Heavens with valuable gems.[46] Whether this actually occurred is, of course, irrelevant; the point is that there was no shame associated with Muhammad's inability to afford the dowry.

As is well known, Khadija was considerably older than the Prophet. The most common ages given are that, at the time of their marriage, she was forty years old and Muhammad twenty-five.[47] However, sources differ on the exact ages. Muhammad could also have been twenty-one or twenty-three.[48] Al-Tabari lists Khadija's age as twenty-eight, while Ibn Kathir includes a report stating that

[43] W. Montgomery Watt and M. V. McDonald, "Translators' Foreword," in al-Tabari, *History*, xxxi.

[44] Barbara F. Stowasser, "Khadija," in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an*, vol. 3, ed. Jane D. McAuliffe (Leiden: Brill, 2003).

[45] Emphasis added. For qur'anic translations, we have drawn on Ali Quli Qara'i, *The Qur'an, with a Phrase-by-Phrase Translation* (London: Islamic College for Advanced Studies, 2004).

[46] Stowasser, *Women*, 179n38.

[47] Ibn Sa'd, *Women of Medina*, 11.

[48] Watt, "Khadija."

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Khadija could have been thirty-five or even twenty-five.[49] Given that she would go on to mother six children with Muhammad, a number of contemporary scholars have concluded that the age of forty cannot be taken literally, and that she must have been younger.[50] Whatever her actual age may have been, Khadija was clearly the older partner, an established woman who "had reached the full bloom of social maturity."[51] Most salient to our discussion is that Muhammad's masculinity was, significantly, not threatened by Khadija's seniority. Note the *silences* of the narratives, what they do *not* say: at no point do the biographers express surprise, let alone alarm, at their marked age difference. Apparently, no one at the time perceived anything abnormal about their arrangement. This stands in contrast to contemporary marital cultures (Muslim or otherwise) in which the man is often the older and thus, more established partner, which of course has lasting consequences in terms of the power dynamics of the marriage.

In addition to Khadija's articulate personality, age, and economic stature, we can extrapolate from other elements of her relationship to Muhammad to support an egalitarian (re)reading of Muslim marriage. First, as mentioned earlier, their twenty-five-year marriage was monogamous. Ayesha states, in a report found in Sahih Muslim, that "Allah's apostle did not marry any other woman till her [Khadija's] death."[52] Given that polygamous relations were the norm in seventh-century Arabia, some scholars have suggested that Khadija may well have specified in her marriage contract with Muhammad that she could be his only wife—at least, while she was alive.[53] Second, it is remarkable that all of Muhammad's sons died in childhood and that only his daughters survived. Khadija and Muhammad had six children together: two sons (Qasim and 'Abdullah) and four daughters (Zaynab, Umm Kulthum, Fatima, and Ruqayya).[54] It seems that 'Abdullah passed away shortly after birth,[55] while there are conflicting accounts regarding Qasim's age at death. Some reports state that he died in infancy, while others claim he had "attained an age when he could ride, even on light, swift camels."[56] Furthermore, it is telling that, out of all of Muhammad's marriages,

[49] See Abu Ja'far al-Tabari, as cited in Tamam Kahn, *Untold: A History of the Wives of Prophet Muhammad* (Rhinebeck, NY: Monkfish, 2010), Epub Book, Chapter: "Khadija, The White Shade Cloud," Section: "The Family;" and Ibn Kathir, *Life*, 191.

[50] Karen Armstrong, as cited in Kahn, *Untold*, Epub Book, Chapter: "Khadija, The White Shade Cloud," Section: "The Family." See also Razwy, *Khadija-tul-Kubra*, 169.

[51] Ali, "Khadijah."

[52] Sahih Muslim, vol. 4, hadith no. 5975.

[53] Nadine Abbot and Maxime Rodinson cited in Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992), 49.

[54] Watt, "Khadija." Watt notes that the titles *al-tahir* ("the Pure") and *al-tayyib* ("the Good") refer to 'Abdullah, and that it is even possible that the names Qasim and 'Abdullah may have referred to the same child.

[55] Kahn, *Untold*, Epub Book, Chapter: "Khadija, The White Shade Cloud," Section: "The Family."

[56] Ibn Kathir, *Life*, 190.

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Khadija was the *only* wife who bore him children who survived.[57] Mariya Qibtiyya (Mary the Copt), whom Muhammad would marry later in his life and well after Khadija's passing, would give birth to a child named Ibrahim but he, too, would die in infancy. This dimension of the Prophet's life is something on which we, as Islamic feminists, must reflect. What does it mean that one of the current pillars of patriarchy, of hegemonic masculinity—specifically, fathering sons—is strikingly absent in the Prophet's life? Admittedly, these circumstances were completely outside the Prophet's control: being unable to father a son was (obviously) not the Prophet's choice. But this reality provides us with a critical biographical counternarrative to challenge the patriarchal imaginaries of our own times, in which to be a "real" man is often directly connected to fathering sons. Indeed, these circumstances have wider theological implications, suggesting that God, in His/Her/Its infinite justice and wisdom, sought ultimately to unsettle patriarchy. As qur'anic interpreter Asma Barlas has asked, is it "a mere coincidence that he loses his father, Abdullah, in his own infancy, and all his sons in theirs; that only his daughters survive, at a time and in a place when people view girls as a curse?"[58]

And, yet, despite all these various elements of Khadija's and Muhammad's relationship (or perhaps, precisely because of them) their story continues to be retold in patriarchal ways. Using a history of the present sheds light on how current patriarchal sensibilities necessitate certain historical narratives to justify current social practices. For example, contemporary Muslim scholar Syed A. A. Razwy refutes accounts that Khadija had been in two previous marriages, insisting that Muhammad was her first, and only, husband.[59] For some reason, Razwy *needs* Khadija to be a virgin in the narrative; her prior sexual experiences with two other men seem to pose a problem, an obstacle for his idealized conception of prophetic marriage despite the fact that virginity, as we noted earlier, was the glaring exception in Muhammad's marriages. (Recall that Ayesha was the only virgin the Prophet married.[60]) Curiously, Razwy also erases Khadija's initiative in proposing to Muhammad. Instead, he portrays her friend Nafisa as orchestrating the entire arrangement on her own initiative. In Razwy's account, Nafisa thinks of Muhammad as a suitable match for Khadija and approaches him without even telling her.[61] As a result of this twist in the narrative, Khadija comes off as shy and passive. Martin Lings—another contemporary Muslim scholar—seems to have trouble negotiating Muhammad's economic vulnerabilities. In his (otherwise comprehensive) biography of the Prophet, he fails to mention Muhammad's manifest inability to pay the dowry (*mahr*). That silence in Lings's narrative speaks

[57] Lings, *Muhammad*, 296.

[58] Asma Barlas, *"Believing Women" in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), 121.

[59] Razwy, *Khadija-tul-Kubra*, 170.

[60] Spellberg, *Politics*, 39.

[61] Razwy, *Khadija-tul-Kubra*, 28.

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volumes; his Muhammad must be a Muhammad who can pay. Lings simply states that the dowry was "20 she-camels," thereby giving the misleading impression that Muhammad paid it himself, and that that payment was not a deep source of anxiety for the Prophet.[62] As discussed earlier, premodern biographers were at peace with Muhammad's poverty. It is modern biographers who are unsettled by the thought of a man's economic vulnerability.

Another source of current historiographical discomfort seems to be triggered by the idea of Khadija as a (married) working woman. Razwy portrays Khadija as giving up her career after marrying Muhammad; essentially, she became a good Muslim housewife. "Once Khadija was married, she appears to have lost interest in her mercantile ventures and in her commercial empire . . . of course, she never lost her genius for organization, now instead of applying it to her business she applied it to the service of her husband. . . . From the very first day, she took charge of her new duty which was to make the life of her husband happy and pleasant."[63] This passage tells us more about Razwy's own twenty-first-century (and thus middle-class, Victorian influenced) context and biases about what the qualities of a pious Muslim woman should be than it tells us anything about Khadija's life. We have no evidence to suggest that Khadija retreated from her business pursuits into the home. The sources on this phase of their marriage are silent. On the contrary, Khadija likely continued to earn *throughout* their marriage; what else could explain—as Islamic scholars Leila Ahmed and Kecia Ali have observed—Muhammad's ability to spend extended periods of time away from work to meditate in the Cave of Hira, where he would receive the first qur'anic revelations?[64] It is this episode in the Prophet's life to which we now turn.

Snapshot 2: The First Muslim(a)

The second "snapshot" of Khadija emerges during Muhammad's election as prophet.[65] As noted above, Muhammad would spend long intervals meditating in the Cave of Hira. It was there, at age forty, that he encountered Gabriel, who informed him that he had been chosen as a Messenger of God and revealed the first qur'anic verses (Q 'Alaq 96:1–5).[66] Muhammad was intensely shaken by this encounter and worried that he had become possessed by a jinn or demon. He

[62] Lings, *Muhammad*, 36. It is worthwhile noting that, unlike Lings, Razwy acknowledges that Muhammad could not pay the dowry himself, stating that his uncle Abu Talib paid the amount of four hundred gold pieces (*Khadija-tul-Kubra*, 32–33).

[63] Razwy, *Khadija-tul-Kubra*, 37–38.

[64] Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*, 42; and Ali, "Khadijah."

[65] Curiously, this second snapshot—appearing in key texts such as Ibn Ishaq, al-Tabari, and Ibn Kathir—is entirely absent in Ibn Sa'd's account.

[66] Ibn Ishaq, *Life of Muhammad*, 106.The wording of this passage is "Read! In the name of your Lord who created, created humankind from a clot of blood. Read! Your Lord is the most generous, who taught by the pen, taught humankind that which it did not know."

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ran away, at which point Gabriel announced to him, again, "O Muhammad, thou art the messenger of God, and I am Gabriel."[67] Muhammad then fled home to Khadija, crying out, "Cover me! Cover me!" (*zammilini*, *zammilini*).[68] She enveloped his shivering body in a blanket and consoled him.

This is a well-known narrative. What is less known is the biographical sources' discussion of suicide, specifically, in the accounts of al-Tabari and Ibn Kathir. Al-Tabari narrated Muhammad's train of thought, in the first person, immediately after the revelation as: "There was not one of God's creation more hateful to me than a poet or a madman; I could not bear to look at either of them. I said to myself, 'Your humble servant is either a poet or a madman, but Quraysh shall never say this of me. I shall take myself to a mountain crag, hurl myself down from it, kill myself, and find relief in that way.'"[69] At this point, on the verge of taking his own life, Gabriel spoke out and reassured Muhammad that he was indeed a Messenger. Furthermore, according to both al-Tabari and Ibn Kathir, the Prophet's suicidal thoughts were not an exceptional moment but rather, a *phase* that persisted throughout the early revelatory period. Whenever there was a delay in revelation, the Prophet would sink into a deep depression and reconsider throwing himself off a cliff.[70] Whatever Muhammad may have actually felt at the time, this narrative offers a different type of prophetic masculinity, one shaped by profound feelings of anxiety, fear, and insecurity. After all, what would people think of Muhammad? Surely, they would see him as a man possessed, or a poet, at best. Note that al-Tabari and Ibn Kathir do not seem to have any problem with the Prophet's dire mental state. That is, in their accounts they do not feel the need to gloss over or cover up Muhammad's thoughts and feelings. He is no less of a man because he cannot cope (quite understandably) with the idea that he is a prophet and cannot bear all the difficulties that thus await him. While this suicide narrative is controversial and contested, what is clear is that the Prophet was greatly unsettled by the revelations—to such a degree that the Qur'an addresses his insecurities directly. At various points, God reassures the Prophet that he is neither a soothsayer (*kahin*) nor a madman (*majnun*) (52:29, 68:2). There are also numerous verses addressed to the unbelievers, clarifying that Muhammad is not a madman (*majnun*), a poet (*sha'ir*), or a soothsayer (*kahin*) (7:184, 21:5, 23:70, 34:46, 36:69, 37:36, 52:30, 68:6, 69:41, 81:22).

As is well known, Khadija played a seminal role in consoling Muhammad when he received the first revelations. She immediately recognized the veracity of his prophetic calling. Ibn Ishaq narrates that Khadija, on hearing what the Prophet had experienced in the Cave of Hira, stated, "Rejoice, O son of my uncle and be of good heart! Verily, by Him in whose hand is Khadija's soul, I have hoped

[67] Lings, *Muhammad*, 45.
[68] Lings, *Muhammad*, 45.
[69] Al-Tabari, *History*, 71.
[70] Ibn Kathir, *Life*, 280; and al-Tabari, *History*, 76.

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that thou wilt be the prophet of this people."[71] Similar narratives can be found in the biographies of al-Tabari and Ibn Kathir.[72] After consoling the Prophet, Khadija consulted her cousin, Waraqa ibn Nawfal, a Christian who had studied the earlier scriptures; he promptly confirmed Muhammad's prophecy.[73] Now this episode can be read as problematic, for Khadija acted here simply as a female messenger—a mechanical go-between—invoking the authority and knowledge of one man (her male cousin) to assuage the doubts of another (her husband). That is, she was not thinking and acting autonomously as a woman. Indeed, in Lings's contemporary account, Khadija repeats Waraqa's response to Muhammad verbatim.[74] But acting as a go-between is not the only role the narratives present. During the early revelations, Khadija also used her own creative reasoning to reassure Muhammad that he was a genuine prophet. The following dialogue between Khadija and Muhammad is taken from Ibn Ishaq's narrative:

> "O son of my uncle, are you able to tell me about your visitant, when he comes to you?" He replied that he could, and she asked him to tell her when he came. So when Gabriel came to him, as he was wont, the apostle said to Khadija, "This is Gabriel who has just come to me." "Get up, O son of my uncle," she said, "and sit by my left thigh." The apostle did so, and she said, "Can you see him?" "Yes," he said. She said, "Then turn around and sit on my right thigh." He did so, and she said, "Can you see him?" When he said that he could she asked him to move and sit in her lap. When he had done this she again asked if he could see him, and when he said yes, she disclosed her form and cast aside her veil while the apostle was sitting on her lap. Then she said, "Can you see him?" And he replied, "No." She said, "O son of my uncle, rejoice and be of good heart, by God he is an angel and not a satan."[75]

In addition to Khadija's sharp intelligence, this exchange captures the affection, the intimacy that existed between her and Muhammad, conveyed not simply through words but also physical contact and the proximity of their bodies. This dialogue can also be found in al-Tabari and Ibn Kathir, although in Ibn Kathir's account there is a curious, patriarchal twist. While al-Tabari is clear that Khadija was the one assuaging Muhammad's doubts (which is the intuitive, if not obvious, conclusion), Ibn Kathir claims, on the authority of al-Bayhaqi, that Khadija set up the entire exchange in order to assuage her *own* doubts about Muhammad's prophecy, the implicit assumption being that Muhammad was (of course) convinced of his prophetic calling and did not require any sort of support or closure.[76]

[71] Ibn Ishaq, *Life of Muhammad*,107.
[72] Al-Tabari, *History*, 68, 71–72; and Ibn Kathir, *Life*, 279.
[73] Ibn Ishaq, *Life of Muhammad*,107; al-Tabari, *History*, 68; and Ibn Kathir, *Life*, 279.
[74] Lings, *Muhammad*, 45.
[75] Ibn Ishaq, *Life of Muhammad*,107.
[76] See Al-Tabari, *History*, 73; and Ibn Kathir, *Life*, 297–98.

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But Khadija was a critical source of both emotional and economic support throughout the early history of Islam, until her death in 619. In (Sunni) Muslim memory, Abu Bakr is usually credited with this hallowed role, as he used his privileged class standing to assist the first Muslims, who were largely poor and economically disenfranchised. But Khadija, too, played a key part in this regard, providing food, shelter, and financial aid, especially when the Quraysh boycotted Muslim labor in an attempt to stifle Muhammad's monotheistic message.[77] Razwy makes a perceptive observation. Due to persecution by the Quraysh elite, two groups of Muslims fled to Abyssinia (in 613 and 615, though the exact years are uncertain), seeking the protection of its Christian king—the Negus (*al-Najashi*)—who was known for his justice and tolerance. As Razwy explains, "the refugees in these two groups were too poor to bear the expenses of travel to Abyssinia. Who equipped their caravans and paid their expenses so they were able to travel? The historians have not answered this question. But it is most probable that Khadija equipped the caravans and financed the emigration."[78]

We have also not fully appreciated the level of sacrifice that Khadija made for Islam; she did not simply use her wealth for the service of the faith, she lost it. Leila Ahmed points out that we have no records of Muhammad or his daughters inheriting from Khadija after her death, and she concludes that Khadija may well have lost all her wealth during the Meccan persecution.[79] Class standing cannot be reduced to wealth alone. Social capital (commanding respect, being valued and considered "important," having access to certain circles and spaces) is a core component of class privilege. Thus, Khadija sacrificed on the altar of her faith a comfortable life of honor and grace in exchange for being "viewed as deluded by all but a handful of friends."[80] This could not have been easy, to say the least. Indeed, it is plausible that the Meccan boycott, in addition to strangling Khadija economically and socially, undermined her physical health and well-being at an advanced age.[81] Note, after all, that Khadija (along with Muhammad's beloved uncle Abu Talib) died at the end of the Meccan Boycott in 619, which is why that year is referred to as the "Year of Sorrow" (*'am huzn*).

Reclaiming Khadija as Paradigm

Before closing, two points of clarification are in order. First, we do not mean to imply that Khadija has been erased in Muslim memory. She is very much present. Yet despite her presence and despite every Muslim child learning about her,

[77] Razwy, *Khadija-tul-Kubra*, 130–31.
[78] Razwy, *Khadija-tul-Kubra*, 138.
[79] Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*, 48.
[80] Kahn, *Untold*, Epub Book, Chapter: "Khadija, The White Shade Cloud," Section: "Revelation."
[81] Razwy, *Khadija-tul-Kubra*, 122; and Kahn, *Untold*, Epub Book, Chapter: "Khadija, The White Shade Cloud," Section: "Revelation."

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Muslims have not felt compelled to question or rethink what they regard as sunna. Curiously, her long relationship to the Prophet did not become a marital model that Muslims across time and place sought to replicate—Khadija 's example has not become paradigmatic. She is remembered in a *particular* way and, as far as gender justice and equality are concerned, a particularly inconsequential way. She is universally honored by all Muslims as being the first Muslim, the first person to believe in Muhammad's prophecy, followed by Ali, the Prophet's adopted son Zayd, and Abu Bakr.[82] In the biographical tradition, we even have a miraculous report claiming that before meeting Muhammad Khadija was participating in a pagan celebration in Mecca, when one of the idols began to speak, foretelling the coming of a prophet by the name of Ahmad. While the other women began to throw stones at the idol, Khadija was struck by its words, listening to them attentively.[83] This episode is significant not because of its veracity, of course, but because it captures the sheer depth of Khadija's faith for Muslims, entering her heart before even encountering the Prophet. Furthermore, we have numerous texts sanctifying Khadija's privileged status as a believer. In the hadith collections of both Sahih Bukhari and Sahih Muslim, we have reports in which Khadija is promised a palace in Paradise.[84] Indeed, there are traditions in the *tafsir* (qur'anic exegetical) and *qisas al-anbiya'* (stories of the prophets) literature in which Khadija is praised as being one of the four "best" women of the world, alongside Fatima, her daughter; Mary, mother of Jesus; and Asiya, the wife of Pharaoh.[85]

Second, we do not pretend to be the first to draw on Khadija in a feminist, egalitarian way. Khadija has become a central reference point for Muslim feminists, who maintain that her monogamous union with the Prophet should be treated as the marital norm and his later polygamous relationships the marital exceptions.[86] Her professional achievements have been equally important. Sufiya Ahmed, in an article rather anachronistically titled "The First Feminist," passionately discusses the leadership qualities and entrepreneurial skills of Khadija, and how she became a role model for Ahmed in her own struggles as a woman in an unjust, patriarchal world.[87] "For me Khadija was the first feminist and she inspired me to become one," Ahmed recounted. "She taught me to stand up for women's rights, for girls' rights, and to challenge inequality and misogyny."[88]

[82] Lings, *Muhammad*, 47.

[83] Stowasser, "Wives of the Prophet."

[84] For Sahih Bukhari, see "The Book of the Merits of the Ansar," hadith nos. 3563, 3564, 3566, and 3567; "The Book of Marriage," hadith no. 4886; "The Book of Good Manners," hadith no. 5617; and "The Book of Tawhid," hadith no. 7003 and 7015. For Sahih Muslim, see hadith nos. 5967, 5968, 5970, and 5971.

[85] Stowasser, "Khadija."

[86] Ali, "Khadijah."

[87] Sufiya Ahmed, "The First Feminist," in *It's Not about the Burqa: Muslim Women on Faith, Feminism, Sexuality, and Race*, ed. Mariam Khan (London: Picador, 2019), 30.

[88] Ahmed, "First Feminist," 43–44.

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But we *are* trying to draw on Khadija in a critical and unapologetic manner.[89] In this article, we have not tried to "prove" that Khadija and Muhammad were nascent feminists who upheld egalitarianism. That is not what writing a history of the present is about. At the beginning of this article we acknowledged, explicitly and unapologetically, the Prophet's numerous polygamous relationships and the acute power disparities (however loving) that existed within them. Instead, we have undertaken a feminist rereading of our inherited historical memory of the Prophet's life, focusing on his (nonegalitarian) relationship to Khadija in the light of the hegemonic masculinities of our times. The argument that we are making is that the prophetic legacy, the historical memory that we have with us in our hands today, actually has conflicting tendencies, possibilities, and horizons within it, comprising patriarchal and nonpatriarchal elements, and because of centuries of male dominance the patriarchal elements have been discursively centered, acquiring the paradigmatic strength of normativity. We, in the spirit of social justice, have challenged that memory by privileging the nonpatriarchal elements over the patriarchal ones. To put it another way, we are trying to "balance out" a legacy of Islamic marital discourse and practice that continues to weigh in on the side of men, despite the radically different gendered context in which we now live. This is a central part of this article's contribution: to demonstrate, through close textual documentation and analysis of these two snapshots of Khadija's and Muhammad's marriage, that there is ample historical material out there to make a compelling case, in our own present, for a feminist sunna, for an egalitarian rethinking of Muslim marriage and by extension, for an egalitarian Muslim masculinity.

Let us conclude on a grounded note, focusing on a brief example to highlight the concrete, legal ramifications of such a feminist rereading of the sunna. *Kafa'a* literally means compatibility, but in the Personal Status Law—that is, Muslim family law (in our personal, national context, Jordanian Personal Status Law)—*kafa'a* refers to financial compatibility between spouses. This concept is taken from Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and goes back to the Ottoman Family Rights Law. Article 45 of this law stipulates that a husband has to be a woman's *kafu'* both monetarily and professionally. Monetary *kafa'a* is defined as the husband's ability to pay a woman's dowry and her maintenance in a manner that she is accustomed to in her paternal home. Professional *kafa'a* means that "the business of the husband or the profession that he chose [has to be] similar in honor to that of the guardians of the wife."[90] In other words, the concept of *kafa'a* presumes that the husband is the principal (if not exclusive) breadwinner and ensures that a woman does not

[89] For a critique of such apologetics in modern Muslim literature, see Kecia Ali, "Muhammad and Khadija," *Critical Muslim* 14, no. 1 (April 2015): 53–63.

[90] Article 47 in *1917 Ottoman Family Rights Law*, trans. (into Arabic) by Muhammad Shaker Bin Ragheb al-Hanbali al-Dimashqi, *Gazette of Legal Verdicts, Fiqh of Mu'amalat in the Hanafi School and Family Rights in Civil Marriage and Divorce*, written by Ahmad Jawdat Pasha (Cyprus: Dar Ibn Hazem, al-Jaffan & al-Jabi, 2004).

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marry someone considered of a lower socioeconomic background to her father.[91] According to the Personal Status Law, a Jordanian woman's guardian (read: father) can actually dissolve a marriage conducted without his approval *if* the husband is not of the same, or higher, financial status than the bride's family.[92] The patriarchal (and classist) understanding of *kafa'a* in Islamic jurisprudence is squarely at odds, as we have shown, with twenty-five years of prophetic matrimony. *Kafa'a*, as understood today, is the diametric opposite of the economic sunna of the Prophet in his marriage to Khadija. Indeed, if the Personal Status Law had been applied to Muhammad and Khadija, they would not even have been able to get married, had Khadija's father objected on the grounds of financial and professional incompatibility. Centering their marital union in Islamic thought is critical, therefore, in not simply reforming aspects of Islamic jurisprudence but in radically transforming its core assumptions in the spirit of gender justice. This is what it means to reclaim Khadija's and Muhammad's marriage as an Islamic paradigm.

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[91] Later laws add age compatibility. See Article 6 of 1951 Jordanian Law of Family Rights, Law 92/1951, Official Gazette No. 1081, August 16, 1915, www.lob.gov/ui/laws.

[92] Jordanian Personal Status Law, 17 October 2010, Article 22b, https://www.iclc-law.com/ar/%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D9%86%D8%B4%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AA/110-%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%88%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%AD%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D8%AE%D8%B5%D9%8A%D8%A9-2010.

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